

BALÁZS APOR – PÉTER APOR – SÁNDOR HORVÁTH  
– TAMÁS SCHEIBNER

## **Cultural Opposition: Concepts and Approaches**

The COURAGE Handbook

The Handbook, which is the main publication that grows out of the COURAGE project, presents the initial findings of the research consortium. The main aim of the volume is to discuss the complexities and the legacy of cultural opposition from the perspective of the collections and suggest possible frameworks of re-conceptualizations of the history of dissent and non-conformism in the former socialist countries of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. Since the format of the publication is a handbook, the narrative aims to offer a synthesis of the existing scholarship, but also to break new ground at the same time. The structure of the individual chapters reflects this ambition.

The Handbook revolves around the material heritage of cultural opposition: the collections. It provides an overview of the history and typology of collections in the countries studied in the framework of the project and offers a concise analysis of the various types of cultural opposition from the perspective of collections. The volume is divided into three parts: the introductory chapters; the country chapters; and the thematic chapters. The introductory section of the book contains two chapters that outline the main aim of COURAGE, introduce the key concepts with which the book engages, and provide a general historical-sociological assessment of the collections represented in the COURAGE Registry. Part II of the handbook consists of concise overviews of the countries—or a cluster of countries—that were explored as part of the project. The country chapters reflect on the history and the material heritage of cultural opposition in the respective countries from the viewpoint of the collections that have shaped and continue to shape the legacy of dissent in the region. The focus of the volume shifts from countries to themes in Part III, which is the most substantial part of the handbook. The chapters in Part III analyze individual collections with regard to specific types or forms of cultural opposition. Each chapter consists of a brief yet comprehensive introduction to the overall theme, as well as a number of case studies discussing one or a small number of relevant collections. Although the narratives in the individual chapters were shaped by the specific stories that emerged from the collections, all chapters reflect on the history and social/political use (or abuse) of

the respective collections. While the thematic chapters present only a representative sample of the collections that were analyzed in the framework of *COURAGE*, they all follow a comparative approach and highlight the similarities, parallels, and transnational entanglements that the study of collections in different social and cultural contexts brought to the fore.

No single book could do justice to the spectacular diversity and richness of material contained in the collections of cultural opposition in Europe and, indeed, across the globe. Thus, the present volume should serve mostly as a first port of call and an essential guide for the curious reader who wishes to navigate through the muddied waters of cultural opposition and its material heritage in the post-Soviet world. The book seeks to demonstrate that the “hidden transcripts” of communist Eastern Europe matter and continue to shape political culture in the respective societies to a significant extent. The notion of “hidden transcript” is understood in the context of cultural opposition as defined by James C. Scott—“offstage,” unsanctioned discourses of power—but also in the literal sense, because collections very often contain actual texts that were hidden from the watchful eyes of communist authorities.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the Handbook highlights the fluidity and elusiveness of the notion of cultural opposition and underscores the importance of analyzing situational factors, individual agency, and intentions behind practices of dissent and non-conformism in order to arrive at a sophisticated understanding of the phenomenon.

The handbook is the product of intense collaboration between over 60 scholars who come from diverse academic backgrounds and over a dozen countries in Europe and North America. While individual approaches to the topic may differ, the contributions are connected by a common thread: the continuing relevance of cultural opposition.

### Studying Cultural Opposition: Key Concepts and Approach

Since the regime change, former socialist countries have been in the process of constructing and negotiating their relationships with their recent past, which includes the heritage of cultural opposition. Opposition, in this context, is typically understood in a narrow sense as referring to open political resistance to communist governments.<sup>2</sup> This book proposes a more nuanced historical conception of cultural opposition, expanding the concept towards broader frameworks of political participation to facilitate a better understanding of how dissent and criticism were possible in the former socialist regimes of Eastern Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

<sup>2</sup> Todorova, Dimou, and Troebst, *Remembering Communism*.

When authorities aim to control public speech and opportunities for democratic public debates are radically restricted, underground public spheres are likely to emerge, and nonconformist movements, whether democratic, Church related, or nationalist, may openly declare their oppositional stances towards the state. Although these kinds of movements are the ones usually associated with cultural opposition today in the memory culture of late socialism, dissident cultures were much more diverse.<sup>3</sup> Several cultural groups with no explicit political program (e.g. punk groups, avantgarde artists, or alternative religious communities) were also branded oppositional by the authorities and, as a result, they were also forced underground.<sup>4</sup> Even communities that formulated a dissident political agenda were not necessarily established with direct political aims in mind, but rather gradually came to accept the role assigned to them by the authorities and society.<sup>5</sup> Studying “cultural opposition,” therefore, requires a shift in focus from mainstream narratives of politically articulate dissident groups and individuals towards a set of complex scenes of nonconformist cultural practices. Or, to put it differently, when we frame the question, the word “cultural” needs to be emancipated from the dominance of the word “opposition.”

Cultural opposition, no doubt, was partly a consequence of and response to socialist state practices. Any attempt to come to terms with cultural opposition, therefore, would be impossible without considering and examining the various practices of state control and the effects of these practices on citizens. However, while emphasizing the role of the state in shaping the definitions of cultural opposition, we also seek to further reflection on the agency of the citizens of the former socialist countries who engaged in autonomous or nonconformist cultural activities. This allows us to re-conceptualize cultural opposition to include both forms of deliberate dissent and autonomous exercises of cultural freedom. Certainly, what is perhaps most exciting in the individual cases of cultural dissent is the tension between these two forms of oppositional culture (deliberate and even programmatic on the one hand and more an incidental but no less meaningful part of cultural pursuits on the other), which were, more often than not, constantly shifting. Rather than creating a rigidly prescriptive definition of cultural opposition, we work with a more dynamic concept which takes into consideration both the diversity of its meanings in various nation states and periods and the fact that the concept of cultural opposition (and its definitions) is a historical product itself.

The most pressing methodological difficulty is how to address both the deliberately oppositional and the nonconformist agencies with a similar historical toolkit so that one can do justice to the complexity of the issue and, at the same time, create a common platform for discussion, comparison, and

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3 See Falk, “Resistance and Dissent”; Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence*.

4 Risch, *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc*.

5 Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*.

assessment of dissident activities. Some dissenters seriously contemplated their positions and produced elaborate texts, while others did not seek to reflect explicitly on their situations or their relationships to the socialist state. Emphasis on the former cases will necessarily lead to a one-sided understanding of cultural opposition. One way to deal with this difficulty is to consider the role of the collections in defining what cultural opposition means. Collecting and creating collections on cultural opposition became a cultural activity in and of itself: a context that framed the everyday lives of socialist citizens working outside or inside official institutions. By investigating this culture of archiving, one might open new perspectives on the world of dissent which would enable researchers to consider a greater variety of dissident activities. We propose to analyze the types of collections that were produced in the former socialist countries and, in particular, the ways in which the collections created implicit or explicit understandings of the political system and the roles of the regime in the genesis of these collections.

The attempt to decenter somewhat the state when understanding cultural opposition and recognize a wide variety of citizens as agents in the creation of the notion of cultural opposition itself has consequences for the periodization of state socialism in Eastern and Central Europe. Archival practices suggest a different chronology than political history, which typically takes 1953, 1956 and 1968 as turning points when it comes to the first decades of communist rule. In contrast, as has been the case in the study of the cultural history of the region in general, a look at archiving culture in the context of cultural opposition suggests a major shift in the mid-1960s. Until then, cultural opposition consisted predominantly of the often clandestine and persecuted preservation of pre-communist cultural heritage, rather than initiatives to create novel critical cultural forms and genres. Drawing a chronological distinction between the preservation of pre-communist traditions and the creation of new cultural practices furthers a more nuanced understanding of the continuities and discontinuities in the cultural heritage of cultural opposition and draws attention to different types of collections based on this (pre-communist and post-communist) heritage. This, in turn, will allow us further to differentiate forms of opposition that manifested themselves in elite and popular culture and oppositional aspects of the culture of everyday life, tastes, and lifestyles.

While we noted above that our approach aims to decenter the state to a certain extent in the study of cultural opposition, we nonetheless expect that, as we shed light on the histories of collections of cultural opposition, we will make significant contributions to the study of state practices as well. Historical scholarship often uses the term “state” as a rhetorical shortcut for the multi-layered complex network of centrally funded institutions and the related individuals in decision-making positions. There is a vast secondary literature on state socialism which examines decision-making processes and the often conflicting personal agendas of high ranked officials. A focus on the provenance of collections will complement this research, because in the cases of

state archives and museums, it will show how local authorities reacted, on the one hand, to grassroots initiatives and emerging new cultural scenes and, on the other, to central administrative measures. As such, this new approach might further a more refined understanding of how the state functioned. “Cultural opposition” is most commonly understood as evidence of the totalitarian control of the state *over* society, rather than as evidence of the complexities of the relationship *between* state and society.<sup>6</sup> We propose to work in this direction, and we claim that cultural opposition should be seen as a historically shaped and socially contextualized phenomenon instead of a set of individual activities carried out by individual actors or communities.

### The Changing Status of Collections: Towards a New Transitology

A typical approach adopted by the post-1989 governments of the region to this question was to take a proactive role and establish specialized archives, collections, and institutes of memory charged with the task of clarifying the “recent past,” uncovering the “truth,” and furthering the “search for historical justice.”<sup>7</sup> The genesis and trajectories of the private and public collections on the cultural opposition movements needs to be considered in this context. These collections often began as parts of civil rights movements in the 1970s and 1980s, but their place in the public sphere only became a key issue after 1989.<sup>8</sup> The documents, objects, and audio-visual footage of the cultural opposition became artifacts during the transition from dictatorship to democracy.

In the former socialist countries, a variety of approaches emerged to the preservation of collections on cultural opposition.<sup>9</sup> Victims’ associations, often backed by pressure groups and public intellectuals, connected post-communist morality to questions of transparency and sincerity about the past: if the “perpetrators” or the “victims” *could* now be discovered, on moral grounds they *had to be discovered*. These campaigns were also conceptualized as an important test of post-communist society’s moral strength to “face up” to its dictatorial past.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the history of cultural opposition was determined by the ways in which the private collections on cultural opposition became open to the public and the ways in which they made, channeled, or masked the history of the former opposition, which became mainstream after 1989.

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6 Mark, “Society, Resistance and Revolution.”

7 Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*; Stan, *Transitional Justice*; Nalepa, *Skeletons in the Closet*; Nedelsky and Stan, *Encyclopedia of Transitional Justice*.

8 Pollack and Wielgoths, *Dissent and Opposition*; Killingsworth, *Civil Society in Communist Eastern Europe*.

9 Light, “An Unwanted Past”; Light, “Gazing on Communism”; Young and Kaczmarek, “The Socialist Past.”

10 Łoś, “Lustration and Truth Claims”; Ash, “Trial, Purges, and History Lessons”; Stan, “The Vanishing Truth?”

We aim to understand this process by focusing on the role of the collections as historical agents in this process. This requires interrogating the ways in which post-socialist cultures have produced knowledge of cultural opposition. The functions, social representation, and history of the collections, secret police archives, and institutes of national memory that have played key roles in the production and promotion of the idea of cultural opposition need to be examined. In addition, by making critical institutional histories the subject of inquiry, we also need to explore how these institutions themselves contributed to the production, reproduction, and shaping of the memory of cultural opposition.

Examining the birth and uses of the collections on cultural opposition is an important means of liberating their holdings from the fetishisation of artifacts as repositories of truth, which was the product of regional understandings of the communist experience. First, the artifacts of these collections enjoyed a widespread faith in their authenticity among the general population in post-communist societies, in part because, before 1989, they had been hidden. Second, unlike third-wave transitions, in which oral testimony was part of the work of state-sponsored efforts to salvage memory (in e.g. History Commissions), the written record was granted particular authority. Despite several important research initiatives, oral history remained marginal in the construction of the public image of the pre-1989 period.<sup>11</sup> This is true despite a number of important initiatives in both the late and post-socialist periods, such as the interview collections in the KARTA Centre in Warsaw or the 1956 Institute's Oral History Archive in Budapest. These emerged primarily from former dissident circles, and they sought to give a voice to other experiences under socialism. In a manner that at first glance may seem somewhat paradoxical, the collections that were originally created to safeguard the artifacts of cultural opposition did not always facilitate research into the documents or artifacts.

These collections remained relatively unfamiliar or obscure, both among academics and in public debates, in no small part simply because most of them acquired the status they enjoy today only after 1989. The collections, which were founded in acts of elaborately symbolic political ritual that were broadly publicized by the media, often with major political figures sitting on the boards of the institutions, were then required to grant the artifacts of the collections a particular status and protection, often out of concerns for the protection of information or personal privacy. In addition, they sometimes had very vaguely defined missions. Last but not least, these new institutions struggled with financial difficulties that left them vulnerable to governmental influence. It is high time to ask how different collections (institutions) reacted to similar problems.

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11 Koleva, *Talking History*; Kovács, *Tükörszilánkok*; Kovács, "Mirror Splinters."

In recent decades, these institutions have undergone a change in image. Increasingly distanced from the politicized moment of their founding and blessed with an array of resources, they have drawn some of the best professionals away from other academic and archival posts. Parallel with this, they have increasingly attempted to present themselves less as institutions of the state and more as specialized collections and professional research institutes. Nevertheless, historians and archivists have often encountered professional conflicts, as their identities as state bureaucrats have been brought into conflict with their identities as scholars and historians.

In this story, the émigré collections fulfil a particularly significant role. Collections that were created by members of exile communities were partly returned to the home countries after the political transition and now are part of the mainstream historical literature and sources in national libraries and archives. These collections and archives were crucial in generating the idea of the “other Europe,” i.e. the anti-communist opposition. After 1989, as the storage sites of authentic evidence of cultural opposition, they provided templates for organizing similar domestic collections, and they shaped the understanding of cultural opposition both in Eastern and Western Europe.

Intellectuals and cultural figures left Eastern Europe in four major waves after World War II. Some fled to the West in fear of the Red Army and the consequences of Soviet rule or did not return to their home countries if they survived deportation in 1945. A larger wave left the region following the communist takeover in 1948–49, and another left after 1956. The fourth was provoked by the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. Certainly, however, emigration continued later in the 1970s and 1980s as well, when the emerging opposition movements began to be persecuted by the communist authorities.<sup>12</sup> These intellectuals and opposition members formed exile communities, mostly in France, the UK (such as POSK, the Polish Socio-Cultural Centre and PUNO, the Polish University Abroad in London), West-Germany, and the USA, and they created important journals, publishing houses, and cultural societies.<sup>13</sup> These institutions were important both in informing Western audiences about the other side of the Iron Curtain and in transmitting critical ideas and expressions of dissent back home. They regularly published the works of the domestic oppositions (in journals like *Párizsi Magyar Füzetek* or *KULTURA*, which was founded and edited by Jerzy Giedroyc, a resident of Maisons-Laffitte), and they supported these oppositional movements with technical equipment and mobilized the foreign media to support their political actions.<sup>14</sup> The exile networks had a particular interest in documenting all possible forms of criticism of and opposition to the communist governments of Eastern Europe. They therefore collected documents of domestic underground, dissent, and nonconformist movements and intellectuals,

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12 Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall*; Raška, *The Long Road to Victory*.

13 Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, *The Exile Mission*; Olszewska, *Wanderers Across Language*.

14 Neubauer and Török, *The Exile and Return of Writers*; Stöcker, “Eine transnationale Geschichte.”

while also keeping records of their own oppositional activities. These exile groups thus created sizable archives that documented the international circulation of oppositional ideas<sup>15</sup> and had a major impact on the modes, genres, and institutions of cultural dissent.

### The Matrix of Studying the Culture of Dissent

When studying the history of collections representing cultural opposition in a way or another, there is a set of central aspects that we would like to highlight. We defined four focus points that will orientate research: the material culture of cultural opposition, the order of collections, the central agents related to the collections, and the networks in which the agents and institutions were embedded.

#### *Material Culture*

The material culture of socialism went rapidly into museums or archives after the political transitions, in particular into sculpture parks, museums of communism, archives of the former state security bodies, and archival collections of the communist parties.<sup>16</sup> In a paradoxical way, the heritage of the opposition was not met with similar interest (neither in politics nor in the public sphere), in large part because it became an important political tool and thus “resisted” the transformation into a part of the “past.”<sup>17</sup> Clearly, collections are more than neutral professional institutions concerned simply with the preservation of knowledge. Through processes of selection, processing, exhibiting, and the presentation to the public of their holdings, the archives and museums in this field take part in the production of knowledge. The modalities of selection and presentation chosen by these institutions constitute statements on the possible forms of culture and cultural opposition, the ideal role of culture in society, and the envisioned makeup of a culturally diverse society. By producing representations, the archives and museums under examination produce concepts of the past and social identities.<sup>18</sup>

Drawing on these insights, one might consider both the collections and their individual objects and documents as actors which participate in the production and negotiation of identities and knowledge. Social and cultural practices occur in the context of material objects. Debates on the meanings of culture (or cultural opposition in our case) in society tend to center on the inter-

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15 Kind-Kovács and Labov, *Samizdat, Tamizdat, and Beyond*.

16 Troebst, *Postdiktatorische Geschichtskulturen*; Brunnbauer and Troebst, *Zwischen Amnesie und Nostalgie*.

17 Sarkisova and Apor, *Past for the Eyes*.

18 Crane, *Museums and Memory*.



pretation of works of art, artifacts, audiovisual footage, and material documents. Ideas about culture are linked to and are associated with objects, and the objects, in turn, trigger processes of interpretation.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the study of how the definitions of different categories of documents, objects, and media preserved in the collections have been shaped seems central to our endeavor.

### *The Order of the Collections*

The insight that European modernity was concerned with the rational (re)ordering of archival and museum collections is central to our inquiries.<sup>20</sup> We seek to understand the transnational interactions that shaped the organization of the collections by answering the following questions: 1) do collections organize their materials according to national and/or international standards; 2) what patterns did they and do they use to preserve the collected documents/objects/media; 3) how have these organizational strategies influenced the typology of cultural opposition movements in the historical scholarship and cultural studies in the former socialist countries.

The strategies on the basis of which the collections have been organized are analyzed in the historical context of “entangled modernity,” which helps us understand how the collections incorporated, adapted, or rejected “modern elements” of preservation.<sup>21</sup> Understanding how the collections reflected the power contests among the actors of the cultural opposition and the stakeholders of the collections seems essential in this regard. Recently, archival studies have pointed out how inquiries into the methods and procedures according to which archives are created and maintained yield important epistemological, historical, and cultural policy-related insights.<sup>22</sup> Instead of merely creating institutional histories, we study collections as instruments of power which have been used to channel and shape cultural discourses.

Since the 1980s, as pointed out above, the role of cultural opposition has changed significantly, and this has had a significant impact on the emerging collections. In the late 1970s, dissident intellectuals and artists could effectively subvert the system of cultural administration by creating their independent, although illegal, fora of publicity. This “second” or alternative public sphere discarded the rules of the official public sphere when its representatives decided not to compete for opportunities within the institutional infrastructure and started to publish *samizdat* literature.<sup>23</sup> With the change of the political regime, the status of the collections also changed. The collections,

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19 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*.

20 Foucault, *The Order of Things*; Bann, *The Clothing of Clío*; Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*.

21 David-Fox, “Multiple Modernities vs. Neo-Traditionalism.”

22 Cook and Schwartz, “Archives, Records, and Power.”

23 Kind-Kovács, *Written Here, Published There*.

which represented new political and cultural identities, became part of the national and international mainstream, while the majority of the cultural goods produced by small dissent communities remained relics of various sub-cultures. This process and the ways collections have been organized are inter-dependent and worth studying together.

### *Agents*

The focus on collections provides a chance not only to approach well-known figures of cultural opposition from their involvement in archiving practices, but also to shed light on the less visible but important agents of dissident culture, like archivists, curators, and translators, who until now have remained largely hidden from historical scholarship.

In search of the people who took part in the production of cultural opposition and in the production of the relevant collections, we identified eight basic categories that might serve as points of reference from the outset. The first category consists of the members of the “hardcore” democratic opposition, who were banned during the socialist period.<sup>24</sup> Their secret collections (*samizdat*, photo documentations of cultural and political performances, footage, art objects, flying university lectures, etc.) were archived only sporadically, and it is high time to map these sources.

Secondly, we are analyzing the activities and networks of elite and intellectual groups of cultural opposition. Members of the democratic opposition became partly involved in socialist artistic and scientific production through their contacts with intellectuals who were employed by state institutions. This elastic but closed formation included both the prohibited non-conformist artists and scholars and intellectuals who sympathized with the democratic opposition in secret.<sup>25</sup> In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Eastern European art began increasingly to draw on contemporary European and North American avantgarde trends, such as Fluxus and performance art. Alternative networks emerged, in which artists developed new forms of social and cultural criticism addressing the repercussions of technological societies.

Thirdly, radical leftist and experimental theatre was also important. Late socialism offered opportunities for leftist groups to work within semi-official youth or theatrical environments; they were critical both of official socialism for having abandoned the cause of the working class or progressive avantgarde culture and of consumer society, which was identified with the *petit bourgeois* mentality, for cultivating mediocre popular culture. Several of these groups, such as Jerzy Grotowski’s *Laboratorium* and Péter Halász’s *Squat Theatre*, won international fame.

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24 Pollack and Wielgohs, *Dissent and Opposition*; Wasiak, “‘Schleichwege’ in der Galerie.”

25 E.g. Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison*; Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition*; Cârnelci, *Artele plastice în România*.

Fourthly, underground and nonconformist youth and popular culture offers a scene worthy of close examination. From the late 1970s on, many new forms of alternative mass and popular culture emerged, such as rock bands, dance house and folklore movements, hippies, and youth culture figures who developed their own autonomous spheres of cultural activism and criticism of the regimes. Rock bands practiced a kind of criticism of the social and cultural repercussions of political repression and cultivated new models of individual autonomy and communities. Folklore cultural networks, the dance house movement, and even architects (who drew on peasant traditions and ideas of “organic architecture”) developed various critical alternatives to late socialist industrial societies (often in the context of semi-supported professional or leisure organizations). Members of these youth subcultures and consumers of rock music were often cast in state politics not as symbolic representatives of a possible way of life, but as enemies of the state, the family, youth, and socialism.<sup>26</sup> The fifth type of agents belonged to various religious groups and institutions. They were particularly significant in community building on the local level. The Church became a protective umbrella for cultural opposition in many cases (e.g. Poland, Romania, and Lithuania), and it played a seminal role in sustaining a sense of national identity, especially with regards to the preservation of national languages and rites of passage.<sup>27</sup> At the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, a range of non-conformist Catholic groupings began to develop forms of religious practice that were critical towards of the communist state and of official Church authorities. Religious groups developed the idea of autonomous moral communities of everyday spiritual practice and called for a more active social presence of Catholics. These groups had grown into nationwide movements by the end of the communist period. During late socialism, transnational religious ideas and practices, mainly the Taizé and Focolare movements, influenced Catholic activist networks and, after 1989, contributed to the formation of broader European networks of Christian value-based solidarity.<sup>28</sup>

A further category might be the employees of the cultural and scientific institutions that implemented the research agenda of the opposition. Several topics and disciplines (such as sociology, psychology, and other fields of the social sciences) were prohibited from academic institutions in the former socialist countries during the Stalinist period. However, as a result of “consolidation” and the modification of the socialist political system, some social science research was tolerated and given a place in academic institutions.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, scientific discourse was limited and censored. The scientific community and institutions produced material of the cultural opposition move-

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26 Risch, *Youth and Rock*.

27 Garbowski, *Religious Life in Poland*; Luxmoore and Babiuch, *The Vatican and the Red Flag*.

28 Apor, Clifford and Townson, “Faith.”

29 Bock, *Scharf überwachte Kommunikation*; Haraszti, *Velvet Prison*.

ments, even in this censored and limited work atmosphere. This category partially overlaps with the one described in the second place above, but we count agents whose work was officially recognized and tolerated.

Some survivors of the Nazi and Stalinist persecutions played a special role in cultural opposition in the socialist era as people who collected and protected material and nonmaterial memories of Nazism and Stalinism in very secret and private ways. These people did not participate in the activities of secret groups and movements, nor did they come into any direct confrontation with the Soviet regime. Rather, they kept the material heritage of victims with the hope that it might be presented to the public and recognized as important once communism had fallen.

Finally, one might consider the roles of the “observers,” which can be studied on the basis of police files on cultural opposition. The institutions created with the purpose of maintaining the files of the former secret police services have had a seminal role in shaping the history of cultural opposition in the former socialist countries. The files they contain helped to create very particular post-communist scholarly understandings of dissent and collaboration. The secret police files were treated as a privileged kind of document, i.e. one that offered more promise of objectivity than the usual historical source.<sup>30</sup> The study of the ways in which the archives of the secret police services organize the files regarding cultural opposition movements will shed light on the ways in which they influence historical scholarship and the popular understanding of cultural opposition.

### *Networks*

The question of networking is crucial to an understanding of the interactions among different actors of the cultural opposition and the collections during and after the socialist period. Several levels, forms, and “fields” can be identified, including local, individual (secret), national, and transnational, as well as private and public. Studies on political transition prove that the interactions between different types of actors of opposition was of central importance to the chances and modes of democratic change.<sup>31</sup> We identify, on the one hand, the networks used in different countries for creating collections and, on the other, the types of networks of the actors of cultural opposition behind these networks. Studying the hierarchy and the organizational structure of this double network, which created the representative collections across the former socialist countries, will facilitate innovative uses of the documents, objects, and media in the collections as historical sources.

Different types and forms of meetings and collaborative undertakings show how actors of the cultural opposition were able to interact under social-

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<sup>30</sup> Apor, Horváth and Mark, *The Faces of the Agent*.

<sup>31</sup> Stark and Bruszt, *Postsocialist Pathways*; Welsh, “Political Transition Processes.”

ism. Personal networks were of crucial importance in the socialist social milieu. Cultural opposition society is built around relationships among individuals, groups, and organizations expressing themselves differently in different cultural settings. The private networks overwhelmed public institutions, in part because they had more specific objectives, target groups, and communicational activities.<sup>32</sup>

Film festivals, cultural festivals, scientific conferences, and international cultural scientific scholarships and summer camps were the main sites of meeting and the exchange of ideas, implicitly providing opportunities for cooperation and networking for figures of the cultural opposition. For instance, the Hungarian “counter cultural forum” was organized as an underground satellite event of the officially promoted ‘85 European Cultural Forum. In Germany, the Lutheran initiative of Aktion Sühnezeichen (AS) played a similar role. Formally founded in the GDR in 1958, the AS operated in both German states as an alternative peace movement initiative and, thus, linked East and West German peace and cultural activists together.<sup>33</sup> As a result of the political transition in 1989, social networks in the post-socialist societies changed radically. Some of the cultural opposition groups disappeared, while others came out from hiding. Opposition members could get central positions in the new political systems, but they could also stay in their subcultures. The memory of cultural opposition and related identity constructions, however, continues to exert an influence on the local, national, and transnational level in all post socialist countries.

### Summary: The Legacy of Cultural Opposition

While the persecution of opposition movements by the communist authorities and the nature of state oppression in general have fascinated both post-communist societies and the wider world, it is surprising how little has been written on the nature of communist-era cultural dissent and on the processes through which post-communist societies have sought to make sense of different forms and meanings of opposition and resistance and how opposition and resistance should be dealt with in the present. Much attention has been given to violent, political upheavals against Stalinist rule in 1953 or 1956 and to the generation of political reforms in 1968. Dissent has been typically approached as a path taken by intellectuals towards “politicization” in a normative sense and towards the creation of anti-communist politics.<sup>34</sup> The role of cultural networks, artists, and intellectuals is usually explored to arrive at an understanding of their contribution to the crafting of novel forms of political thought. This work is, no doubt, important to further an understanding of

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32 Konopasek and Andrews, “A Cautious Ethnography of Socialism.”

33 Király, “Portable Projects?”; Legerer, *Tatort*.

34 Falk, *Resistance and Dissent*; Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék*.

the emergence of democratic politics in the former socialist countries and recognize the existence of an “other Europe.”<sup>35</sup> However, we would like to contribute to the growing recognition of various forms of non-political cultural activism and explore the roles this non-political cultural activism played in generating non-conformist, alternative, and dissenting sub-cultures that challenged one-party rule in multiple ways.

Popular (and often lurid) accounts of opposition tend to naturalize the concept as an obvious and incontestable characterization of communist-era dissent behavior. It might be worth interrogating, for a change, the ways in which post-socialist cultures produce the idea of and knowledge of anti-communist “opposition” and “cultural opposition.” By addressing the institutions that produce the concept and examining the functions, social representations, and histories of archives and institutes dealing with cultural dissent that create these histories of cultural opposition, researchers might demonstrate the remarkable complexity of these regimes and the everyday embeddedness of cultural opposition, as well as how they capture many important aspects of the ways in which these regimes were dismantled.

Cultural opposition in the former socialist countries is part of a pan-European culture. The circulation of ideas and cultural resources (such as literature and works of art) were essential to the scene, and transnational linkages emerged among various groups of artists and intellectuals. Countercultures played a central role in a growing awareness of regional identities that were fostered in part by these processes. Drawing on the idea of *l’histoire croisée* (entangled history),<sup>36</sup> we seek to further analyses of the different modalities of cultural opposition and the similar socio-cultural milieus in which they emerged in the various countries. From this perspective, there is a promising perspective from which to write the history of East and Central Europe that is not reduced to the sum of the histories of the different states. In contrast to the dominant comparative focus on East-Central European states, this project seeks to understand regional, cross-national processes that often transgressed the Cold War boundaries of East and West.

Finally, the COURAGE project highlights the positive values of the cultural opposition in the former socialist countries, which affirm a pan-European cultural legacy: democratic participation, civic courage, solidarity with the oppressed and the poor, and cultural diversity. This approach will break through the barriers that so far have hindered the discovery of the pan-European relevance of cultural opposition. By focusing on its cultural values, we will detach the legacy of the cultural opposition from its conventional narrow political framings, which have confined cultural dissent to a specific political system: Communism.

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35 Rupnik, *The Other Europe*.

36 See Werner and Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison”; Ther, “Beyond the Nation”; David-Fox, Holquist and Martin, *Fascination and Enmity*.

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